

## NOTES

## PRELIMINARY NOTES ON AN EARLY IRON AGE SITE IN THE GREAT KEI RIVER VALLEY, EASTERN CAPE.

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Until recently the most southerly limit of Early Iron Age settlement was thought to be along the Transkei coast, with Mpame dating back to as early as AD 640 (Cronin 1982). There has been some speculation, however, that Early Iron Age (EIA) populations may have spread well south of the Transkei into the Ciskei, possibly up to the Great Fish River. These areas are on the very outer limits of the summer rainfall region on which the EIA people were dependent for cultivating their crops. It is commonly accepted that an ecological boundary restricted these populations in their southward migration. The question is just how far south do EIA settlements occur?

Some two years ago decorated pottery was found at the confluence of the Kulubele River and the Great Kei River by Victor Biggs (Fig. 1). A visit to the site a year later by the first two authors confirmed that a large number of decorated sherds were scattered over a small area next to a large erosion gully, the nature of the decoration on the pottery suggested that it was of Early Iron Age origin. The site is situated on the southern banks of the Great Kei River Valley some 200 metres below the plateau and 60 km inland from the coast. The site was visited again several months later together with Tom Huffman and Simon Hall of the Archaeology Department at the University of the Witwatersrand. They confirmed that the pottery belongs to the Msuluzi Phase of the Early Iron Age (Fig. 2). Closer investigation revealed several pits and a dung lense in the side of the erosion gully. One of the exposed pits was cleaned (leaving the most of the contents in the wall for later excavation), surveyed and charcoal collected for dating. A date of  $1250 \pm 40$  BP (Pta-5865), with a most probable calibrated age of AD 799 (Vogel, pers. comm), was obtained for the sample. In addition to the potsherds, fragments of bone and a shell pendant were also recovered from the side of the pit. Pieces of daga containing vegetation impressions confirm the presence

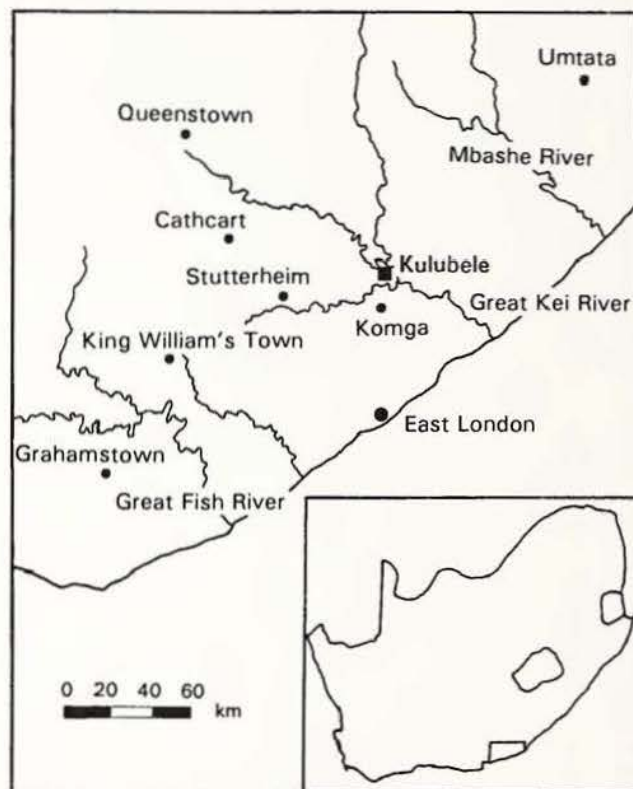


Fig. 1. Location of Kulubele.

of a settlement, which, from our preliminary survey, appears to have covered a large area.

Reports of another EIA site south of East London suggests that the Ciskei region of the eastern Cape may well provide important information on the movements of EIA populations. Cronin (1982) was of the opinion that EIA settlements would have been restricted to the coastal regions; these findings clearly belie his conclusions and

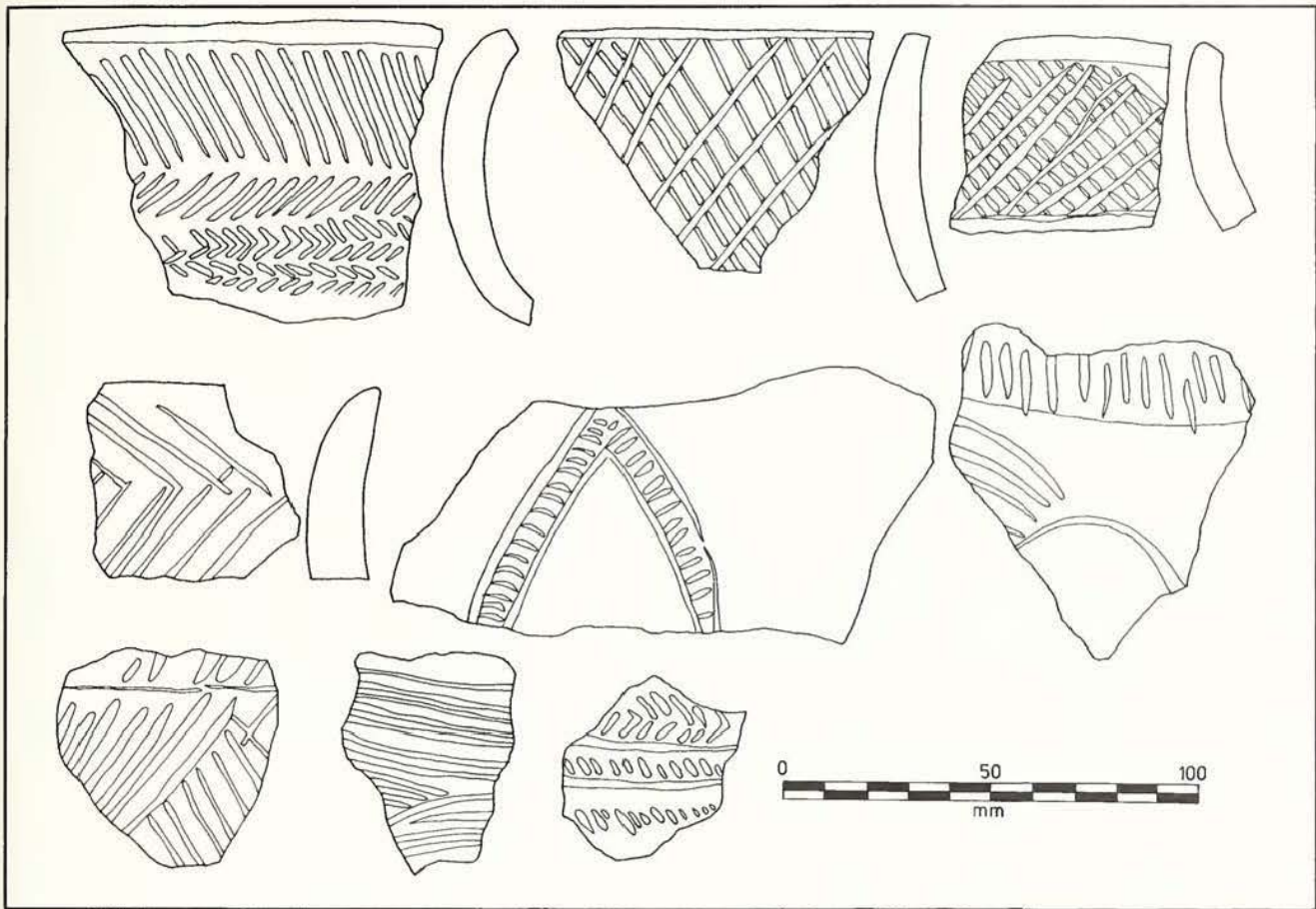


Fig. 2. Decorated pottery from Kulubele.

indicate that further research in this area may substantially increase our knowledge of the Early Iron Age.

#### REFERENCES

- Cronin, M. 1982. Radiocarbon dates for the Early Iron Age in Transkei. *South African Journal of Science* 78(1):38